

ERRATA

On page 10 of this year's theme book you will find Wikipedia listed as a source for the images. This occurred because the agency who submitted the images downloaded the images from Wikipedia. Unfortunately, the mistake went undetected in the final editing process. Rather than simply acknowledging and apologizing for this error, we are opting to turn it into a learning opportunity. Below is one way to explain to students why Wikipedia is never a good source for historical research.

Materials needed:

- LCD projector and laptop computer
- Internet connection
- Definitions of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources (provided)
- Historical biographies by David McCullough *I use books by David McCullough as examples because he is a prolific writer/researcher and he uses source notes and a bibliography.*

Procedure: Introduce or review the definitions for different types of sources. Next divide the students into small groups and provide each group a book by McCullough. Ask students to examine the bibliography and discuss what they notice about the types of sources listed.

- What type of primary sources does he use?
- What type of secondary sources?
- Do you find any tertiary sources? Why or why not?
- How about internet sources? Why or why not?
- Why is Wikipedia not listed as a source in McCullough's books?

Explain: Wikipedia is considered a tertiary source because it is an encyclopedia. In addition, Wikipedia is unique because it is an open source web site. In the case of Wikipedia, this means:

- Anyone who has an internet connection can edit any text or image.
- Users can contribute anonymously, under a pseudonym, or with their real identity.
- The expertise or qualifications of the user are not considered.

Discuss with your class why this is a problem for researchers (opinions expressed not necessarily based on evidence, facts confused...).

Bringing the Point Home: Using a laptop and an LCD projector, display John Brown's Wikipedia page on a screen (or any Wikipedia page of a historical person or event). With your class observing, click the edit tab in the upper right hand corner of the web page. When the edit page opens you can: add an opinion (John Brown was a great American hero), change a fact (John Brown was arrested by the abolitionists) or delete information. All changes will automatically save. Discuss with your class what this means for a researcher. What if the editor is an expert? What if the editor is not? How does the reader know what information is correct in an open source document?

Teacher's Choice: To help your students understand why the text they read on Wikipedia is questionable, here are two options:

1. You and your class can track the changes you made on Wikipedia for a week to see if the changed information is corrected by Wikipedia's editors. If the changes are not corrected by the end of the week, as a class restore the changes to the original text.
2. You and your class change the information back to the original text before you end the lesson.

Either option is coupled with a discussion about professional ethics. Changing information on Wikipedia is not a game.

Definitions of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources

Primary Source-The most common definition of a primary source is that which is written or produced in the time period. Primary sources are materials directly related to a topic by time or participation. These materials include letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, artifacts, or anything else that provides first-hand accounts about a person or event. This definition also applies to primary sources found on the internet.

Secondary Source- Secondary sources are usually published books or articles by authors who were not eyewitnesses or participants in the historical event or period and who base their interpretation on primary sources, research, and study. These sources provide context for a historical event. For example, high school history textbooks, biographies, retrospective newspapers and other history books about a particular topic are secondary sources. This definition also applies to secondary sources found on the internet.

Tertiary Source-Tertiary sources are summaries and collections of primary and secondary sources. These sources provide ideas for topics and further investigation. Some examples are almanacs, encyclopedias, dictionaries, guidebooks, manuals, etc.

TOPIC	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	TERTIARY
Civil War	Photograph by Mathew Brady	Article on battle strategies of the Civil War by James McPherson	Civil War database
Westward Movement	Diary of Sarah Jane Osborne	Monograph on the life of Sarah Jane Osborne	Dictionary on wagons of 19 th century America
Industrial Revolution	Patent for the sewing machine	Book describing the social changes due to the sewing machine	Manual on the uses of sewing machines
World War I	Enlistment Posters for World War I	Web site on World War I	Encyclopedia of World War I
World War II	War movie filmed in 1943	Magazine article about World War II	Dictionary on World War II
Civil Rights	Recording of a speech by Martin Luther King Jr.	Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr.	Guide to the 1992 movie about MLK

